



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

Messiah Killers — What Now?

Acts 2.37–40

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Review/Introduction

1. Addressing a Jewish audience that was reacting to the visible and audible evidence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter explains and interprets the event.
 - a. God was fulfilling the prophecy of Joel, bringing about the things that were to happen upon the arrival of “the last days” (Joel 2.28–32; Acts 2.17–21, esp. v. 17).¹
 - b. The specific fulfillment was embodied in Jesus of Nazareth (2.22–36).
 - 1) He was a man attested by God with mighty works, wonder, and signs (v. 22).
 - 2) He was delivered over to “lawless people” for crucifixion, “according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge” (v. 23).
 - 3) But God raised him from the dead, evidence of which was found in fulfilled prophecy, the empty tomb, and witnesses to the risen Jesus (vv. 24–32; cf. Ps 16.8–11).
 - 4) Jesus was exalted to God’s right hand and enthroned; this was also according to prophecy (vv. 33–35; cf. Ps 110.1).
 - 5) “Therefore ... God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (v. 36).
2. Verses 37–47 report the response to Peter’s sermon and initial development of the first church.

From Convicted to Delivered (2.37–40)

Conviction (v. 37).

3. In an understatement, F. F. Bruce begins his comments on v. 37 by saying, “Peter’s preaching proved effective, not only persuading his hearers’ minds but also convicting their consciences” (Bruce 1988, 69).
 - a. Using a word that appears only here in the NT, Luke reports that “they were pierced [κατανύσσομαι, *katanyssomai*] to the heart.” The word means, “to be stabbed (with a knife)” (Arnold 2002, 236).
 - b. Try to put yourself in their shoes: they had rejected—killed!—the one for whom they had been waiting and the (only) one who could save them; what was left for them now?
 - c. They cried out, “Brothers, what should we do?”

Commitment (v. 38a)

4. “[Peter] calls for a public radical testimony of conversion, not a private, noncommittal request for

¹ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture translations are from the CSB.

salvation with no conditions” (Keener 2014, 325).

5. To emphasize the more important command last, we’ll reverse the order of Peter’s answer: to apparently no one’s surprise (Bruce 1988, 69), he told them to be baptized (βαπτίζω, *baptizō*), that is, “to dip (in water),” “immerse,” “sink,” or “drench” (Arnold 2002, 236; cf. Bauer 2000, 164).
 - a. This baptism is “in the name of Jesus Christ,” distinguishing it from other ancient baptisms² and underscoring that they were submitting to the authority Jesus possesses (Harris 2019, v. 38 sn 83).
 - b. Ferguson notes that baptism is “an expression of repentance and faith, and is itself a confession” of allegiance. As “a result ... and expression of repentance,” baptism amounts to “a pledge of allegiance, an oath of loyalty to Christ” (Ferguson, 1996, 181–182).
 - c. Romans 6.3–4 illustrates the connection between baptism and forgiveness/new life: having died to sin (repentance; see below), we are “buried” by baptism after which we rise to newness of life.
6. But baptism is of little value without repentance.
 - a. “Repent” (μετανοέω, *metanoeō*), literally “to know after” (Spicq 1994, 472), refers to “a serious change of mind and heart about a previous point of view or course of behavior” (Danker 2009, 230).
 - 1) As the Greeks, and then Jews like Josephus and Philo used the word, the idea of changing one’s mind extended to a change of intentions and plans, and then to reflection.³
 - 2) Repentance, then, is “that change of mind or heart, produced by godly grief, which leads to reformation of life.... Repentance involves a fundamental reorientation of their lives” (Ferguson 1996, 175–176).
 - b. As other passages show, remorse over sin is only the beginning of repentance, not its definition; furthermore, while it involves a one-time decision, it is not a one-time action.
 - 1) See Acts 3.19 where Peter pairs it with “turn[ing] back” (ἐπιστρέφω, *epistrephō*), a change of direction.
 - 2) See also Jesus’ instructions to Peter after his denial: when he “turned back” (*epistrephō*), he was to “strengthen his brothers” (Luke 22.32).⁴
 - c. F. F. Bruce’s comments about the connection between repentance and baptism here are notable:

It would indeed be a mistake to link the words “for the forgiveness of sins” with the command “be baptized” to the exclusion of the prior command to repent. It is against the whole genius of biblical religion to suppose that the outward rite could have any value except insofar as it was accompanied by the work of grace within. In a similar passage in the next chapter (3:19) the blotting out of the people’s sins is a direct consequence of their repenting and turning to God; nothing is said about baptism, although it is no doubt implied (the idea of an unbaptized believer does not seem to be entertained in the New Testament). So here the reception of the Spirit is conditional not on baptism in itself but on baptism in Jesus’ name as the expression of repentance (Bruce 1988, 70).

Consequences (vv. 38b–40).

7. The initial consequences, or blessings, that result from faith (implied in their question in v. 37),

² Keener (2014, 324) writes that, “because baptism was a sign of conversion to Judaism normally reserved for pagans, Peter’s demand would offend his Jewish hearers and cost them respectability.” That Peter calls for it, and they consented to do it, indicates its historical importance as “the central rite performed for incorporating new believers into the church” (Arnold 2002, 236). See also the comments regarding what happened versus what might have been expected regarding baptism (in light of John’s baptism) in Bruce 1988, 69.

³ Spicq (1994, 472 n. 8) illustrates the idea of reflection with this quotation from Philo (*Spec. Laws* 1.58): “Some people are so foolish that they do not even leave themselves any room for a change of heart” (εἰς μετάνοιαν).” Thus, “the function of *metanoia* is to ‘introduce a new form of thought or feeling’” (Spicq 1994, 472; citation from *Tabula of Cebes* 10).

⁴ Compare with Judas who regretted (μεταμέλομαι, *metamelomai*) his actions, but did not turn back (Matt 27.3; cf. 2 Cor 7.8–10, where Paul speaks of his own lack of regret [*metamelomai*] because the Corinthians went beyond grief over sin to salvation).

repentance, and baptism are specified in vv. 38b–40.⁵

- a. Forgiveness of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, *eis aphesin tōn hamartiōn*) (cf. the phrase in Matt 26.28; Mark 1.4; Luke 3.3; 24.47).
- b. The gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - 1) The phrase, “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, *tou hagiou pneumatos*), “is a genitive of apposition; the gift consists of the Holy Spirit” (Harris 2019, v. 38 n. 85).
 - 2) Bruce (1988, 71) writes, “The gift of the Spirit is to be distinguished from the *gifts* of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is the Spirit himself, bestowed by the exalted Lord under the Father’s authority; the gifts of the Spirit are those spiritual faculties which the Spirit imparts, as he ‘apportions to each one individually as he wills’ (1 Cor. 12:11).” See Acts 5.32.
- c. They become part of the promised people of God.
 - 1) The promise of the gospel was extended beyond those present that day, not only beyond Jerusalem and to the present generation, but to their descendants too.
 - 2) Peter’s words echo Isaiah 57.19 (“The LORD says, ‘Peace, peace to the one who is far or near’”) and Joel 2.32, specifically the words after those quoted in Acts 2.21: “for there will be an escape for those on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, as the LORD promised, among the survivors the LORD calls.”
 - 3) Luke doubtless understands what Peter at this point probably does not (cf. Acts 10.9–17, 34–35): this refers to Gentiles as well as to Jews wherever they might be.
- d. When they responded as Peter told them, they would be saved from “this corrupt generation” (γενεᾶς ... σκολιᾶς; *geneas ... skolias*; cf. Luke 3.5; Phil 2.15); that is, from the unforgiven, unsaved world.
 - 1) Regarding this verse, Bruce (1988, 72) emphasizes that “the deliverance of which Joel had spoken [see above] was to be enjoyed by a remnant of the whole people; so now Peter urged his hearers to make sure, by a repentant calling on the Lord, that they belonged to this remnant and saved themselves from that perverse generation.” The 3,000 (v. 41) are thus a remnant.

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⁵ David Lipscomb referred to “the forgiveness of sins” as a *blessing* of repentance and baptism (Gross 2000, 312).